Let the rivers run red

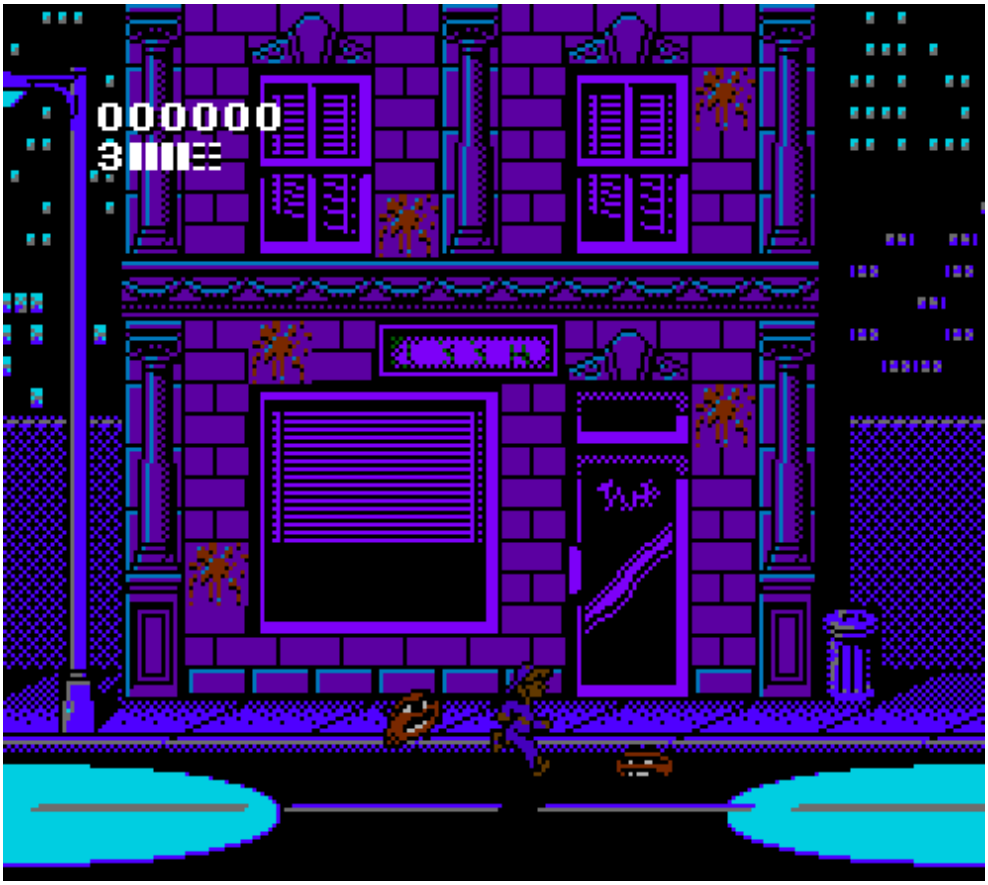
Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

'Attack of the Killer Tomatoes' is *undoubtedly* the worst movie in cinema history ...at least since the *last* train wreck I claimed was the worst movie in cinema history anyway. A bona fide Z movie abomination that in a sane world would never spawn a video game, any sequels, spin-offs or an accompanying comic book. In fact, it's guilty of *all* such crimes, *and* more.

Three official video games were foisted upon the unsuspecting public, *three* movie sequels (one featuring George Clooney!), an animated cartoon and a comic book adaptation of the first movie. As of 2018 - believe it or not - another movie sequel is in the works. Tom-*ate*-oes or tom-*ard*-oes, surely no-one needs any more sentient, murderous pizza filling in their lives.

ATTACK
OF THE
KILLER
TOMATOES
TM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In its defence, Attack of the Killer Tomatoes is an entirely self-aware, intentionally awful, low budget spoof of '50s B movie schlock horror sci-fi. It never takes itself remotely seriously so pointing and laughing at how preposterous it all turned out is like 'revealing' that Tommy Cooper was a hopeless magician. Still, sensationalism is fun so let's not dispense with that entirely.

You wouldn't expect Killer Tomatoes - a dark musical comedy-horror spoof released in 1978 - to boast much of a plot, so you won't be surprised to learn that it can succinctly be summarised thusly: tomatoes develop a consciousness beyond their station in the plant kingdom and try to take over the world. There's a *little* bit more to it, mostly expositional hooks on which to hang the overripe tomedy.

A government experiment aiming to produce more voluminous tommies results in them mutating into giant, rampaging, human-terrorising varieties with evil in their hearts and murder on their minds. Hey, it *could* happen, tomatoes *are* part of the deadly nightshade family after all. Clearly this predicament isn't ideal for the future well-being of civilisation, hence a plan is hatched to quash the rebellion. Anyone fancy a glass of mutant tomato squash? It's totally organic... if you pick out the gunshot.

Spearheading the campaign is the president, the worst America will ever endure it's assumed. Ha! Wait until you meet Trump! You ain't seen nothin' yet. Relatively speaking, the totally competent president rounds up an elite squad of freedom fighters led by Mason Dixon. Operating beneath him is 'master of disguise' Sam Smith, scuba diver Greg Colburn, Olympic swimmer Gretta Attenbaum, and parachuting action man Wilbur Finletter. Blending in seamlessly, eating hotdogs around the campfire, none of the killer monsters suspect Smith's true identity, until he asks one of them to "pass the ketchup". Oops! Even psychotic mutants won't stoop to cannibalism.

Complicating matters, the tommies are assisted by a *human* assassin - double-dealing press secretary, Richardson - who attempts to snuff out the president in a botched sniper operation. As this fruity offensive escalates, the army is deployed to bring the situation under control, the police having failed miserably. Film a toy tank and you don't have to bother upscaling the enemy. Genius!

In the early stages of the siege a helicopter is mobilised, yet before it can drop off its convoy, crashlands in a field. If the special effects look more convincing than logic (and the meagre $100,000 budget) should dictate, keep in mind that this scene was 100% genuine. Entirely unscripted, the tail rotor blades grazed the ground causing the chopper to spin wildly out of control, immediately becoming engulfed in flames. Destroying the hired prop ate into the piggy bank to the tune of $60,000! No-one was seriously injured so with no taste and decency issues to debate the footage was preserved and worked into the story.

> "We were hit by a kamikaze tomato!"
>
> "Tomatoes can't fly!"
>
> "Yeah? Well, they can't eat people, either, but they're doing one hell of a job of that!"

Unwittingly the killer tomatoes' Achilles' heel is discovered; their invasion can be neutered by playing the super-cheesy song 'Puberty Love'. This is exploited to full effect by cornering them in a stadium and exposing the squidgy blighters to its deadly melody. A finale device that would later be ripped off by the Mars Attacks production team.

As the tomato battalion recedes to a more manageable stature, the community stomp them to mush. All but one cunning ear-muff-defended critter who is thus immune to the threat. Dixon to the rescue; presenting the sheet music for Puberty Love to the lone survivor calls an end to the tomato crisis, saving reporter Fairchild in the process. Obviously that's their cue to fall in love, at breakneck speed without any sort of romantic groundwork. Calling out each other's name repeatedly, running towards one another in slow motion, the lovestruck couple finally embrace. Right before breaking into song, this after all (occasionally) being a

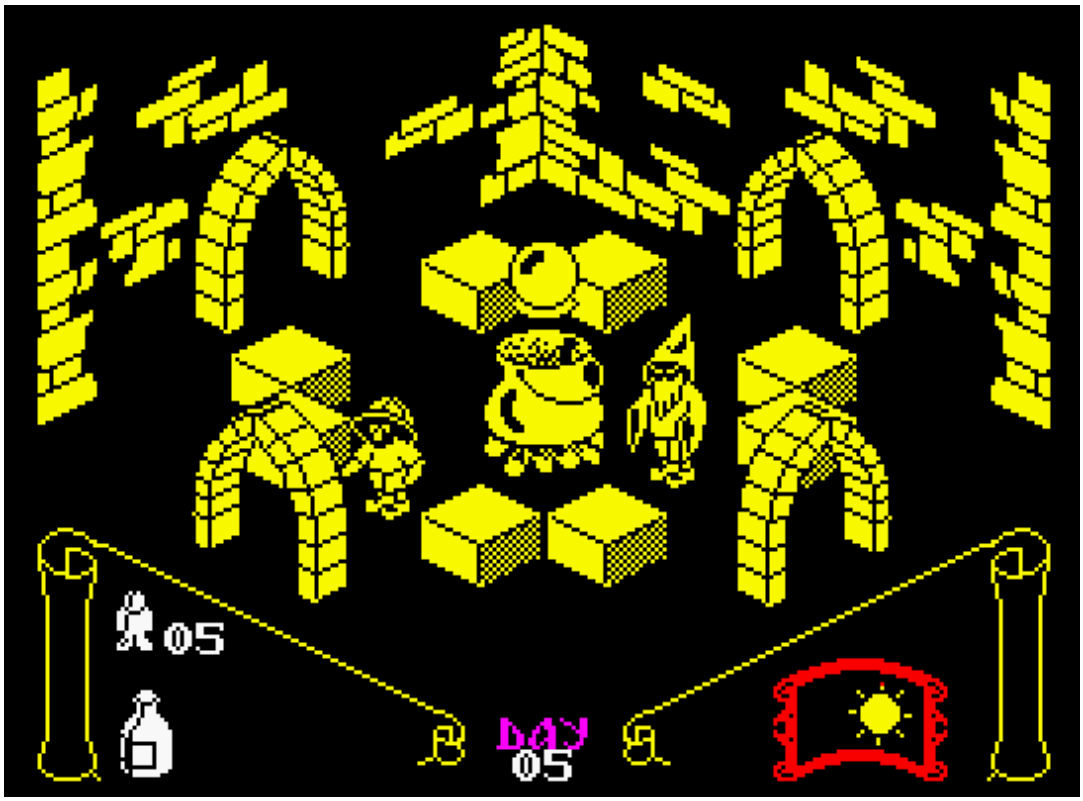
musical. Opening with the movie's catchy theme tune lyrics should have been a big clue. The same ones recycled to introduce its cartoon adaptation.

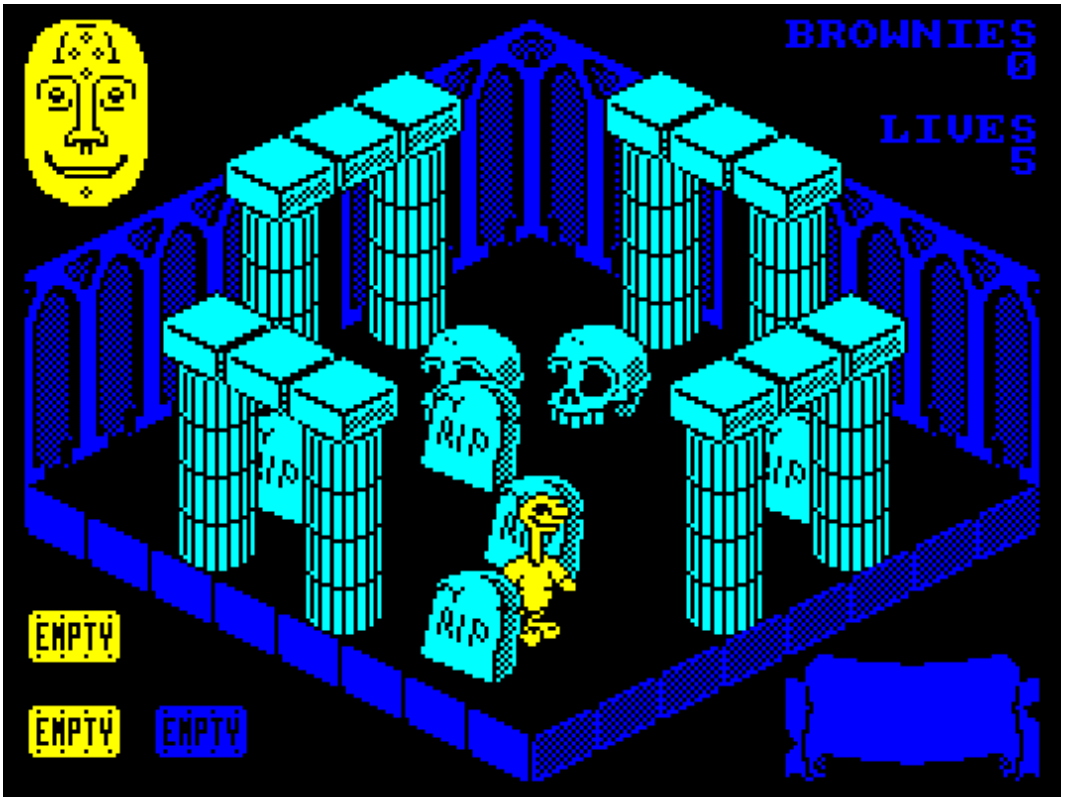
With the coast clear a carrot arises from the soil declaring, "All right, you guys. They're gone now." Hinting that now's the perfect opportunity to mount their own offensive?

In 1986 Global Software published the first of the Attack of the Killer Tomatoes licensed tie-in games, released for the Sinclair Spectrum, Amstrad CPC and MSX. It was developed by Bob Coles (Dobbin), Richard Huddy (Fatman) and Stuart J. Ruecroft. All three variants look so similar you'd struggle to tell them apart, suggesting a nasty case of lazy port-itis was doing the rounds. A C64 title was planned though ultimately slumped into Games that Weren't territory.

Fully ripened, what fell from the vine was an isometric action affair in the guise of Knight Lore or Sweevo's World, sharing

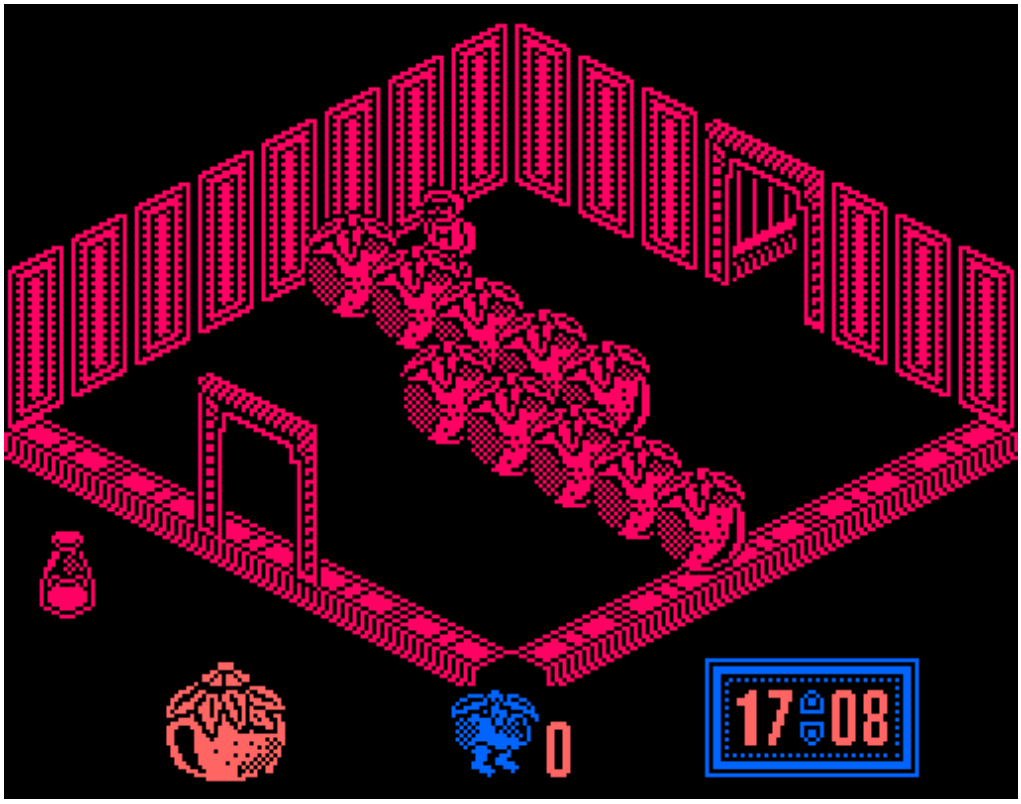
nothing in common with the movie's plot besides starring the eponymous pulpy troublemakers.





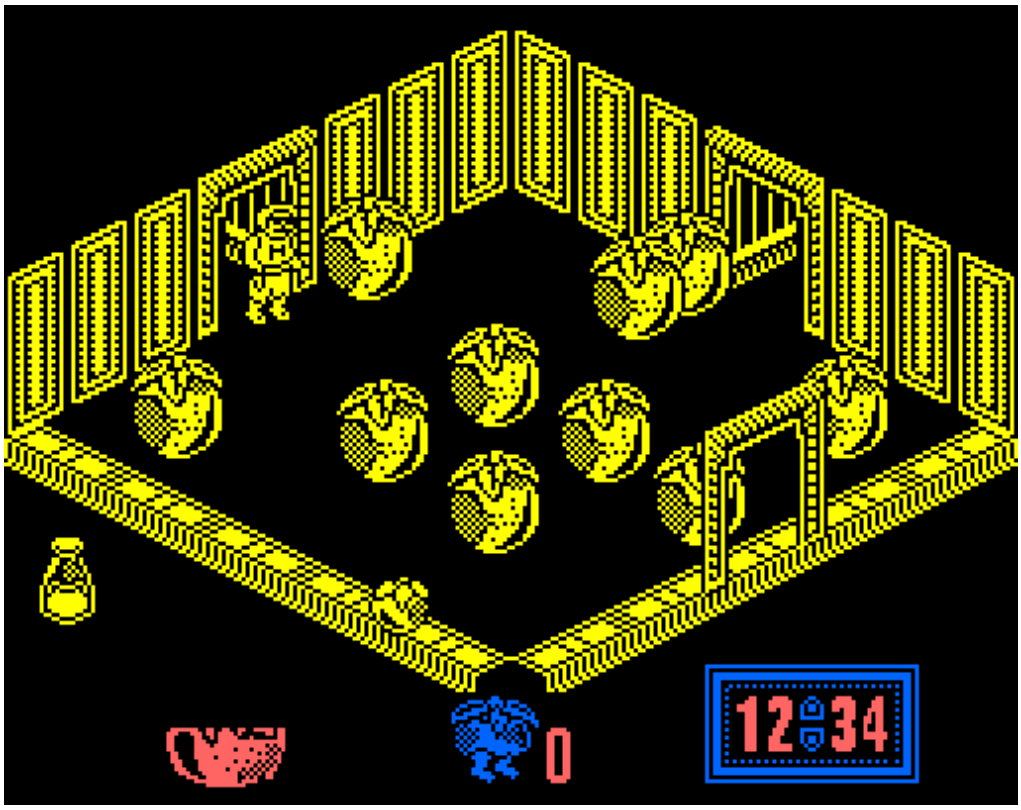
We play as Wimp Plasbot (obviously an anagram of Bitmap Plows, duh!), an employee of the Puritron Processing Factory tasked with ridding the plant of killer tomato mutant invaders to maintain the flow of puree to the nation's pizzeria outlets. We have eight and a half hours to complete the mission, though extra time can be clawed back by finding and punching clock cards.

Rotating left and right to steer, marching forwards once pointing in the desired direction, our H for hero navigates the single screen rooms dispatching opponents with a zap gun or avoiding them entirely. Another button serves as jump to help with this.

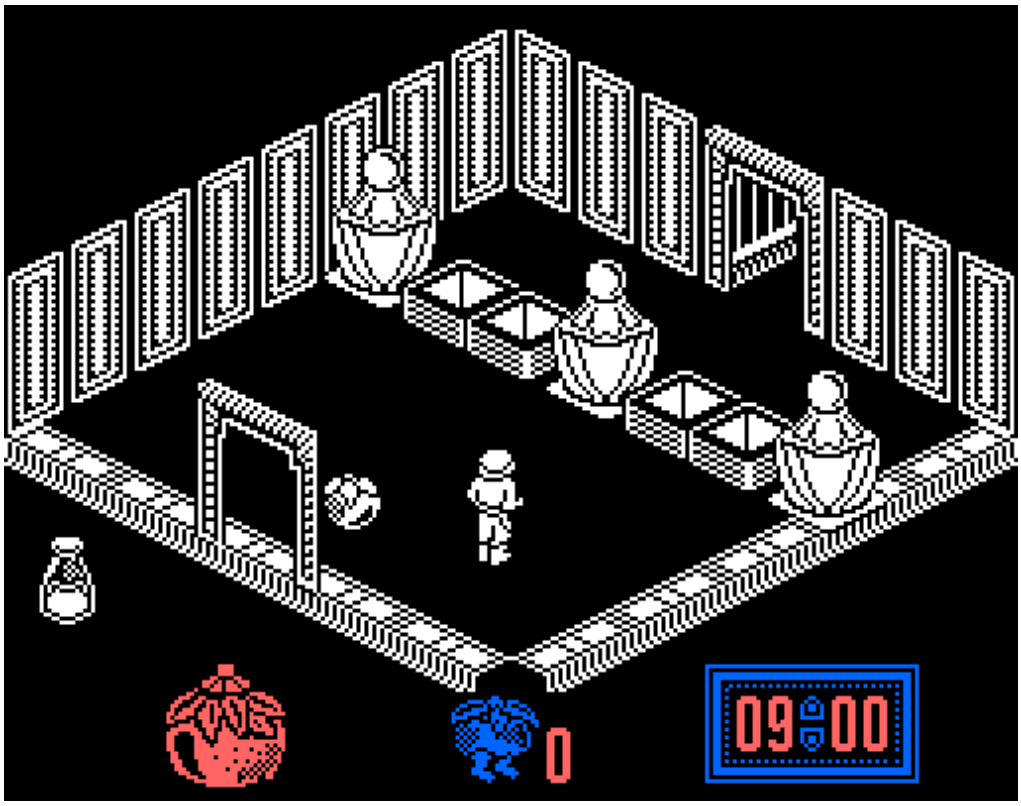


Three types of foes are encountered...

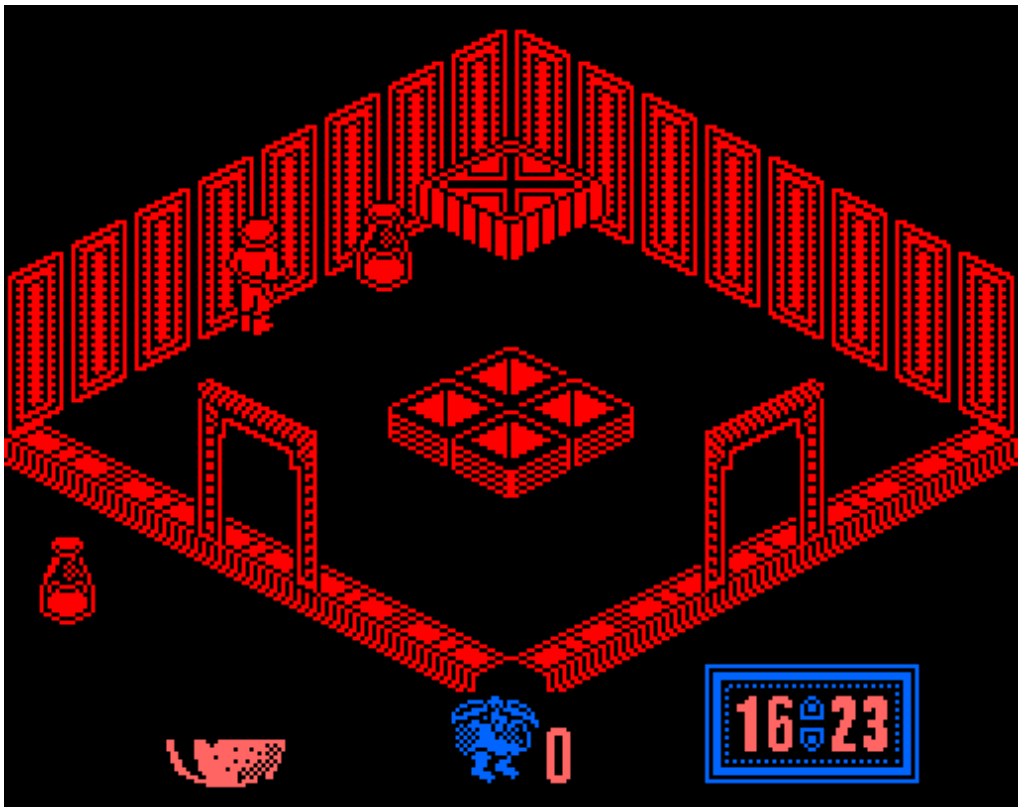
- Mobile, mutated killer rebels that must be shoved into (hopefully bottomless) pits.
- Pre-existing captives destined to be pureed who only bounce around excitedly getting in the way. These must be corralled and placed in the crusher to maintain the status quo.
- Motionless variants who dwindle away our precious time if a collision occurs, making it all the more difficult to beat the clock.



Saving pizzaphiles from dry dough catastrophe (the stakes are high then!) demands the collection of various objects used to solve puzzles. These are deployed either as stepping stones to higher platforms or as a counterbalance to alter the configuration of obstacles.



One part of the inventory is reserved for these knick-knacks, the other for storage of deactivated tomatoes. Stowing away the condemned fruit allows them to be transported to and deposited in the limited number of crushers, topping up our tomat-o-metre in the process. If this drops to zero our timer takes a half-hour hit.



Puree enough tomatoes within the specified time limit and the business survives, ketchup crisis averted. Why Global Software didn't just replicate the movie's premise is anyone's guess. Did the translation really have to be so mundane? One of the few positive things you can say about the almost laugh-free comedy movie is that it's hyperbolic - the continued existence of humankind rests on the destruction of the red threat. Set piece build-up fluff and flat punchlines embracing racism, sexism, and homophobia constitute the rest of the movie. All delivered by a cast of unknowns, most of whom subsequently dropped out of the biz altogether.

> Ted Swan: We have to convince the little housewife out there that the tomato that ate the family pet is not dangerous!

On the defence panel committee sits a Japanese scientist dubbed in English by the most Caucasian American voice-over actor you can imagine. Dr Nokitofa's schtick aside from

his lips being out of sync with his voice is that he gets some of his words mixed up, to 'hilarious' comic effect.

> Dr Nokitofa: Technically sir, tomatoes are fags.
>
> Dr Morrison: He means fruits.

The joke being that both are derogatory terms for gay people. Groan.

He's not the only one with a Malapropism problem.

> General: You'd better bring a coat Mr Richardson, there's a little Jap in the air.
>
> Dr Morrison: He means nip.

Redeeming himself, the doc *is* at the centre of one of the better jokes. Gesticulating too enthusiastically in the tiny meeting room he knocks a picture of the USS Arizona - a vessel sunk at Pearl Harbour by the Japanese - off the wall and into a goldfish tank. Boom-boom-tsh! Squeezing everyone into said miniature board room is a recurring gag in itself. The members of the congregation must edge around one another, climb over the table, apologise for the inconvenience etc.

Despite the short runtime everything seems to drag on forever. Taken to extremes this results in a slow-motion car 'chase'. At one point Mason climbs out of his moving vehicle, running to ketchup with his mark on foot. It would be funny if we weren't so bored and weary by this stage, which in Heinzsight makes me think that the whole thing condensed into a thirty-minute montage of the best bits might have been a better idea. You could simultaneously complete the game just in time to see the carrots and rolling credits,

maybe pausing in-between to fully appreciate the movie's Superman and Jaws allusions.

Global's game is well animated and nicely drawn, yet there's little to really set it apart from all its predecessors in the isometric genre. Once you've seen a few rooms there's not much more to discover before reaching the final crusher. It's odd then that Killer Tomatoes was so well received by the critics at the time of release. Let's find out what they had to say...

> "Yet another 3D monochrome game and I still don't get tired playing them. Killer Tomatoes is a take-off of the other 3D games - it's even programmed by Fatman and Dobbin! My favourite part of the game was squashing the tomatoes although I feel more could have been made of the squelching and killing.
>
> Killer Tomatoes contains a massive maze and just like Knight Lore it takes a lot of time to get anything like a good score. I also found a few more similarities to the

aforementioned game - starting in different locations, only being allowed to drop two items in each room and a few others. Killer Tomatoes is more of a fun game to play than Knight Lore but still requires lots of serious gamestering to get around obstacles, and with lots of good podgy tomatoes around, it's one of the jolliest 3D games around."

Crash (89%, May 1986)

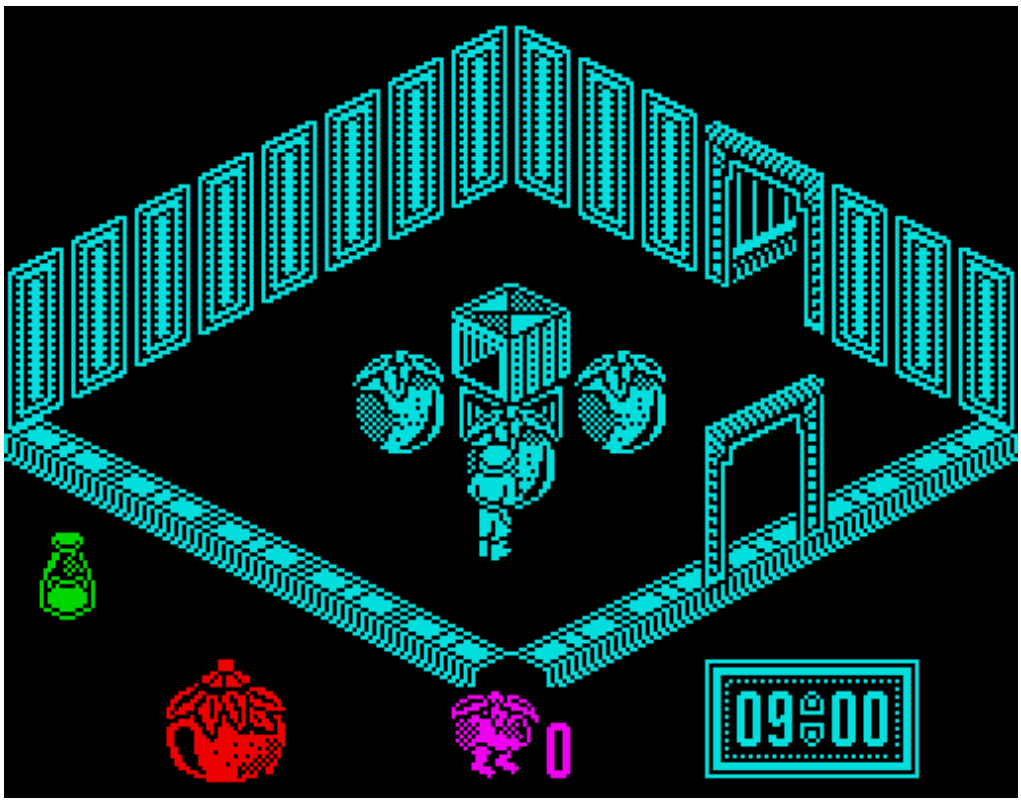
"I was pleasantly surprised when I loaded this one up, I thought it was going to be another of those mediocre games that has nothing other than its name going for it. I really enjoyed playing Killer Tomatoes as it has a special quality that will keep me playing for ages to come. Graphically it is very similar to Sweevo's World, very fast well-drawn single colour isometric 3D, with large characters all jolly and nicely animated.

On the sound front however it doesn't have much going for it, only the odd beep here and there and no tune,

which is a shame as it would have added to its atmosphere a little.

Generally, I would recommend this game to everyone as it is compelling and playable."

Crash (89%, May 1986)

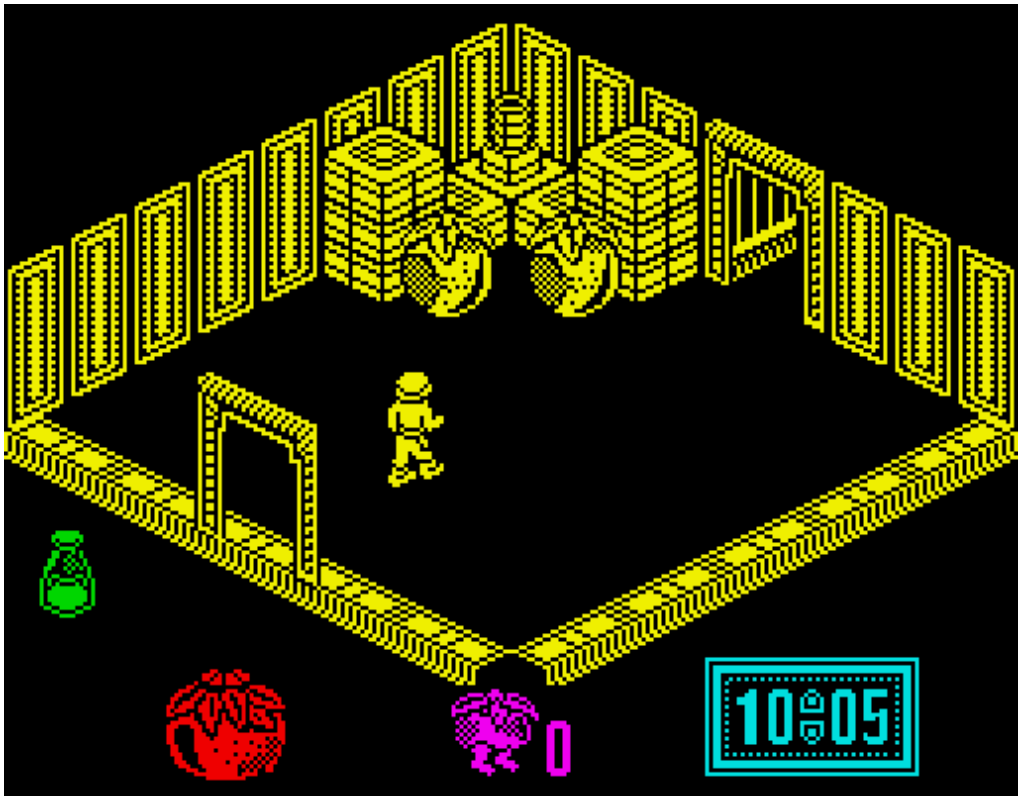


"Despite the awfulness of the movie of the same name, AKT is an excellent game, though it does owe quite a lot to previous releases. It's yet another 3D effort, though a very good effort it is. The graphics are speedy and pretty and give the effect of 3D which is held nicely throughout.

As for the game, it's great and is quite funny as well. Wimp Plasbot is a wonderful hero who's easily persuaded to perform the actions required of him. There's a lot of challenge to keep the hardened gamesters at bay but it's

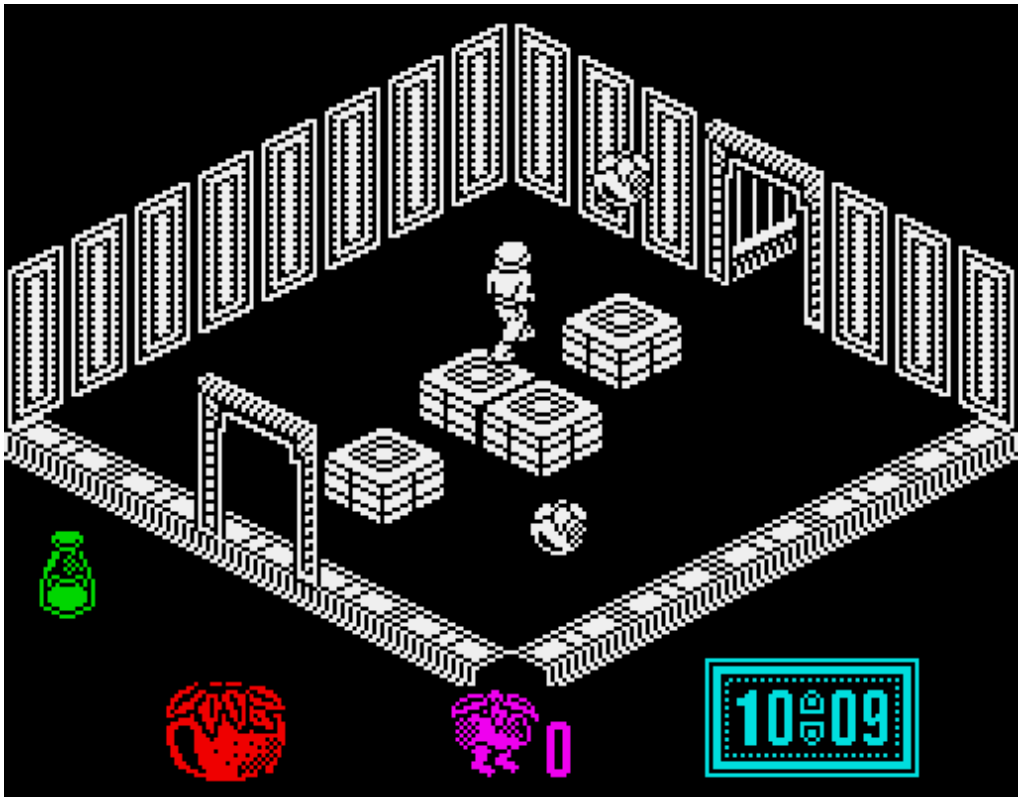
easy enough for any simian to get into. Definitely worth a good look at."

Crash (89%, May 1986)



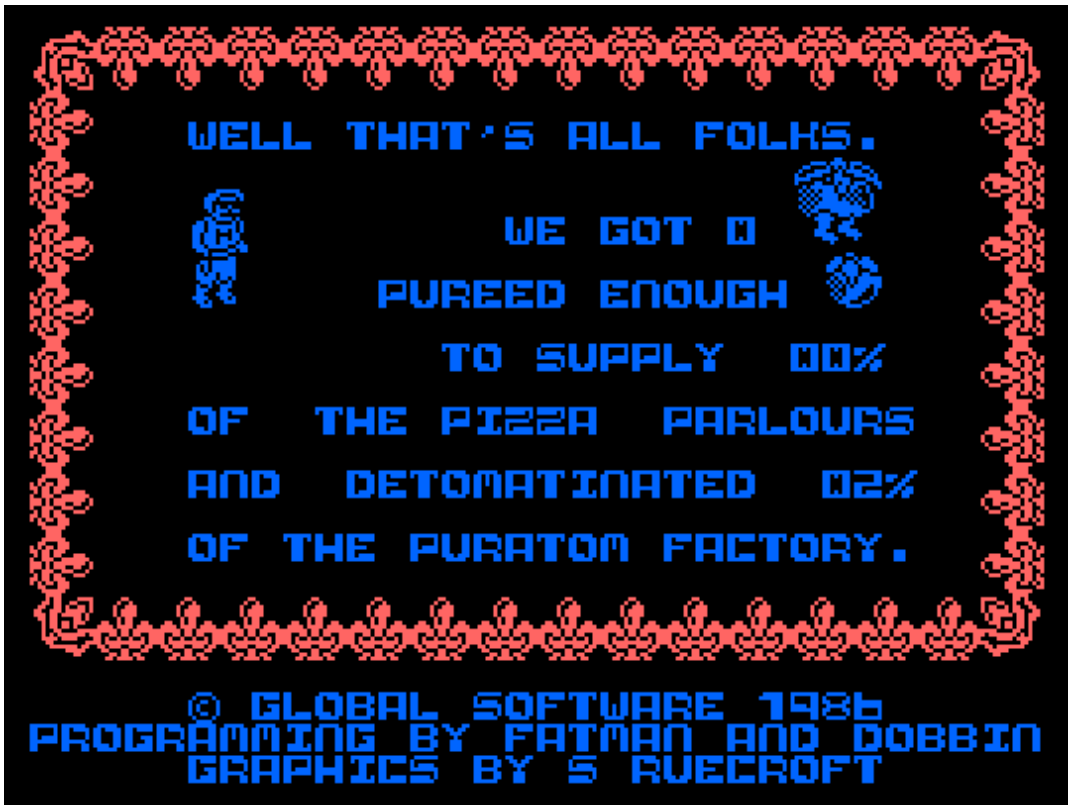
"It's probably a simpler game to get to grips with than many of the Ultimate type, being rather less cryptic. Fun though, and in converting the film nominated Worst Vegetable Movie of all time Global has created a tie-in far better than the original deserved - and far better than many superior films have received!"

Your Sinclair (80%, June 1986)



"Killer Tomatoes is quite a complex, and very professionally produced game, that should keep you occupied for quite a while, but its similarity to all the other Knight Lore inspired titles left me feeling that it didn't really offer anything I hadn't seen before."

ZX Computing ("great", no score, May 1986)



Nope, I still don't get the appeal. Focusing on an irrelevant setting and forgetting to include any world-saving shenanigans or to translate the movie's wonderfully overblown, pompous theme tune were major missed opportunities. I think I'll give Bill's Tomato Game another whirl in the blender instead.

Killer Tommies was in fact to be just the first in a series of games adapted from 'Golden Turkey Award' winning movies, published by Global Software. 'Attack of the Mushroom People' - voted 'Worst Vegetable Movie' despite being a fungi - would have followed if... if Tommies had been a chart success? 'The Wild Women of Wongo' suffered the same fate.

Killer Tommies was merely a runner up in the same category as 'Mushroom People'... and that's a figgin' *fruit*! Leaving pucka vegetable-based monstrosities to stew in their own juices.

Global Software continued to publish/develop games until 1993 (they brought us Tearaway Thomas and PP Hammer for the Amiga amongst others), so clearly weren't suffocated by psychotic inanimate casserole ingredients back in the '80s. Which would seem to suggest that the public simply weren't salivating at the prospect of dining on potentially terrible games based on certifiably terrible movies.